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Chapin Spencer
Director of Public Works

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Transportation, Energy, Utilities Committee

FROM: Chapin Spencer, Director, Public Works
Cindi Wight, Director, Parks, Recreation & Waterfront
Robert Goulding, Public Information Manager, Public Works
Nicole Losch, Senior Planner, Public Works

DATE: January 21, 2022

RE: E-Bikeshare Update & Possible Next Steps

OVERVIEW

On May 5, 2021 Burlington, South Burlington, Winooski, the University of Vermont (UVM), Champlain College, the Chittenden Area Transportation Management Association (CATMA) and the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) executed a one year contract with renewal options with Bolt Mobility to bring a fleet of electric bicycles to the region at no cost to the parties. This came after 3 years of a traditional (non-motorized) bikeshare network operated by Gotcha and then Bolt (after merger and purchase).

The goals of this system include:

- Providing convenient, alternative transportation choice to residents and commuters to reduce vehicle miles traveled
- Growing the number of bike users and bike commuters in the region
- Creating an equitable system that allows anyone fair access to an e-bike

A brief timeline of how this partnership came to be is shown below:

- 2017: After extensive community engagement, Burlington City Council approves the City's first walk bike masterplan - planBTV Walk Bike. This Plan calls for the establishment of a bikeshare network.
- 2018: CATMA issues an RFP on behalf of the regional partners. A limited pool of businesses applied with Gotcha selected to establish the network.
- 2018-2020: Gotcha operates traditional bikeshare network and parties negotiate the transition to an electric fleet

- 2019: Burlington City Council approves DPW to enter into a one year contract with the possibility for renewals
- 2020-2021: Covid delays contract finalization and e-bike transition. Gotcha is sold to Bolt and is heavily impacted by supply chain challenges
- 2020: CCRPC releases an RFP to determine if other bikeshare vendors are interested in the Chittenden County market. Limited applications are received and the regional partners conduct some interviews. Other vendors don't seem like as good of a fit, are less flexible and do not commit to hiring a local employee to manage the system.
- 2021: Supply chain challenges relax and Bolt commits to an electric fleet for 2021 at no cost to regional partners.

ANALYSIS ON RENEWAL

Areas of opportunity: Overall, we are pleased that Bolt met the commitment of paying a livable wage, hiring a local employee, transitioning the bikeshare network to an electric fleet, expanding the number of hubs from 17 to 28 and providing good customer service. They have been candid with us about supply chain challenges in getting the fleet up to 200 bikes (averaging 99 available bikes) and early technical trouble with their speed restrictions. They did agree to concessions which likely went against their business interests due to stakeholder concerns, including: placing a 10MPH restriction on bikes on the waterfront path, moving the popular College St station to a less visible waterfront location and adding signage to hubs.

Areas of improvement: We need the fleet to expand and the number of hubs to expand further into neighborhoods. While we do think bike share riders should have access to the waterfront, we do not want a Waterfront station to be the dominant station in this network – which it currently is. Neighborhood expansion and purpose driven (as opposed to recreational) trips are our priority. Additionally, we want to see more aggressive marketing, including of the equity plan and the development of an escalated pricing model (to further discourage recreational trips).

Regional Partners' Assessment: Further discussion with our regional partners yields much of the same feedback, though in conversations with the regional partners there is strong interest in renewing the contract with Bolt. There is universal agreement that this first year did not meet full expectations, but acknowledgement that the pandemic played a role in Bolt's overall performance. Marketing and fleet/hub expansion are clearly on our partners' priority list. They appear prepared to extend Bolt's contract, but given the greater number of considerations in Burlington, City staff want to bring this to the City Council's Transportation, Energy & Utilities Committee for input before determining our direction.

City Staff would be supportive of renewing the contract for an additional year if Bolt will agree to the City's top priorities that will better achieve the bike share goals laid out above.

Initial staff recommended priorities for a contract amendment:

- Increase hubs, including the use of virtual hubs further into residential areas. *DPW Transportation will be supplying a priority list of additional hub locations and Bolt has agreed that virtual hub expansion is a priority. City Staff recommends the contract be amended to require Bolt to add no fewer than 10 additional hubs in residential neighborhoods by June 1, 2022.*
- Pursue an aggressive local subscriber strategy. *Most 2021 users paid through a pay as you go plan which likely means a high level of visitor use. We want to see more use by local residents. City staff recommends including requirements in the amended contract for strategies such as:*

First 15 minutes free in spring to boost engagement, college partnerships for deep discounts for affiliates, CarShare Vermont and Green Mountain Transit discounts, etc.

- Develop and implement an escalated pricing model. Bolt reports progress in this area though there are no firm commitments yet. Is this still a priority for Burlington stakeholders? If so, we recommend additional commitments be required in the amended contract.

Are there other priorities TEUC members would like to see? Based on the 2021 bike share performance, what approach would committee members suggest?

Other City commitments if Bolt contract is renewed:

We understand outdoor shops are also potentially interested in a presence on the waterfront. Parks, Recreation and Waterfront will look at issuing an RFP for a summer 2022 waterfront site after meeting with bike shops to understand interests and needs.

Options other than renewing:

1. Bike Share partners could issue a new request for proposals (RFP)
2. Burlington could leave the partnership and issue our own request for proposals
3. Burlington could leave the partnership and not seek to advance a bike share system

Considerations of not renewing:

- ☐ Whether we choose to not renew or issue an RFP, we could potentially have no bikeshare network for the foreseeable future.
- ☐ We have yet to find another vendor who has committed to the amount of service flexibility that Bolt has offered.
- ☐ There are only a handful of stations in the right-of-way or on City property. Burlington could choose to walk away, but other partners can exercise the right to maintain a relationship with Bolt. There is nothing prohibiting Bolt from continuing to operate in the City. In this case, we would not be contractual partners and would lose the Burlington specific conditions in the contract and the trust built up over 2 years of partnership. It would also put a dent in the ability to stand up an integrated regional system. Instead, regulatory changes would be necessary to force Bolt or other vendors into making changes (i.e., speed restrictions, etc).

We look forward to the conversation at the upcoming TEUC meeting. Feel free to reach out in advance with any questions.